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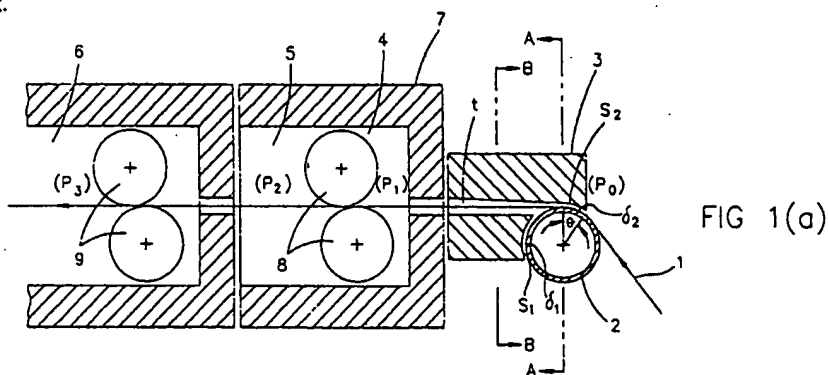
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⑤4 Differential pressure sealing apparatus and method.

57) A differential pressure sealing apparatus and method for processing a continuously moving elongated sheet through successively different stages of vacuum.

A vacuum chamber is provided with an inlet and a guide roller for the incoming sheet and, to resist the entrance of air into the chamber, a sealing structure encompasses at least portions of the entrance, the guide roll and the sheet.



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DIFFERENTIAL PRESSURE SEALING APPARATUS AND METHOD

This invention relates to a differential pressure sealing apparatus and method effective for maintaining continuously a plurality of different degrees of vacuum or negative pressure at spaced locations along the length of a continuously moving object such as a sheet metal plate, strip, belt or other work object, all of which are hereinafter and in the claims collectively referred to as an "elongated sheet".

5 When surface coating of sheet metals is performed by so-called dry plating, using processes such as vacuum deposition, ion plating, sputtering etc., a long thin sheet such as a cold-drawn or hot-drawn steel belt is continuously subjected to a so-called "air-to-air" treatment. In this procedure the degree of vacuum applied to the surface of the sheet is alternately raised and lowered while the elongated sheet reaches the dry plating area by passing through a number of spaced-apart areas having vacuum differences among
10 them. These are hereinafter referred to as "differential pressure chambers". Differential-pressure seals are provided along the path of movement of the sheet which permit the continuous passage of the sheet while maintaining the pressure differences among the respective differential pressure chambers. In this specification a differential-pressure sealing apparatus is described which effectively provides differential-pressure seals without causing damage to the sheet or other work object being processed.

15 Many proposals have already been made for conducting air-to-air plating procedures for metals. For example, reference is made to U.S. Patents Nos. 2,384,500; 2,972,330 and 2,996,410, as described in Mitsubishi Juko Giho, Vol. 21 (1984), No. 6, pp. 125-131. With the progress of precision manufacturing technologies in recent years, the practical development of these proposals is proceeding. Among these sealing methods, especially in the reference cited last, the sealing area is enlarged so that the elongated
20 sheet of metal is sandwiched between a pair of rollers with their axes slightly offset in the direction in which the sheet is moving, and the elongated sheet follows along the roller surfaces.

Recently, moreover, in Japanese Patent Laid-open No. 62-13,572, an attempt has been disclosed in which a seal bar and an adaptor enclosing the sheet material are combined, and the pressure difference is maintained within this enclosure. In either case, however, since the sheet material is sandwiched and
25 compressed between a pair of rollers and made into a sheet passing between them, the treated sheet material undergoes bending and compression stresses on its front and back surfaces, and the tension on the sheet is increased.

These tension forces and the local surface pressures generated have adverse effects on the quality of the product; for example, when the air-to-air method is applied to grain oriented silicon steel sheets, it has
30 been found that the magnetic properties of the plate are caused to deteriorate.

Moreover, in addition to this problem, it has also been indicated recently that when brittle elongated sheets comprising a metal such as the above-mentioned grain oriented silicon steel are treated, breakage of the sheet or plate tends to occur due to contact with the sealing device itself, because of vibration.

It is an object of this invention to provide a differential-pressure sealing apparatus and method which
35 overcomes the foregoing disadvantages, and which is suitable for treatment of elongated sheets by processes including the air-to-air method, and which can produce effective differential-pressure seals without causing the quality of the product to deteriorate or the sheets to break.

The foregoing and other objects of the invention will further become apparent hereinafter and in the drawings of which:

40 Fig. 1(a) is a view in side section showing one embodiment of sealing device in accordance with this invention,

Figs. 1(b) and 1(c) are sectional views taken as indicated by the lines and arrows A-A and B-B, respectively,

45 Figs. 2(a) and 2(b) are diagrammatic views of sealing devices in accordance with this invention and portions thereof, Fig. 2(b) is shown in an inverted position in order more clearly to illustrate important details,

Fig. 3 is a graph showing the effects of magnetic properties in response to changes of wrap contact angle θ (the ordinate) and the tension in kg/mm² (the abscissa),

50 Fig. 4 is a graph showing the relationship between degree of reduction of iron loss of an elongated sheet (ordinate) and surface pressure exerted by the roller seal (abscissa),

Fig. 5(a) is a view in side section of a portion of an apparatus, showing an alternative form of the invention,

Fig. 5(b) is a sectional view taken through the apparatus appearing in Fig. 5(a),

Fig. 5(c) is a view in perspective of a portion of the apparatus of Fig. 5(a),

Fig. 6(a) is a view in side section showing one embodiment of sealing device in accordance with this invention,

Figs. 6(b) and 6(c) are sectional views taken as indicated by the lines and arrows A-A and B-B, respectively,

5 Fig. 7 is a sectional view taken through a seal according to this invention,

Fig. 8 is an enlarged sectional view showing the manner in which the seal portion of Fig. 6 is maintained according to this invention,

Fig. 9 is a diagrammatic view of a portion of an apparatus comprising an alternative embodiment of this invention,

10 Fig. 10 is a view in side section showing portions of a still further alternative embodiment of the invention,

Fig. 11 is a fragmentary sectional view showing still another embodiment,

Fig. 12 is an exploded view, taken in perspective, showing still a further alternative embodiment of this invention,

15 Fig. 13(a) is a fragmentary view in side section showing still a further alternative embodiment of this invention,

Figs. 13(b) and 13(c) are sectional views taken as indicated by the lines and arrows C-C and D-D, respectively,

Fig. 14 is a sectional view of a portion of a further embodiment according to this invention,

20 Fig. 15 is a sectional view of a portion of a still further modified apparatus in accordance with this invention, and

Figs. 16, 17(a) and 17(b) are enlarged sectional views of modifications of the entrance portion of the apparatus.

Turning now to the specific forms of the invention selected for illustration in the drawings, the right-hand
25 portion of Fig. 1 shows one form of a differential-pressure sealing apparatus according to this invention, applied in particular to the atmospheric pressure portion of region P_0 - P_1 . Vacuum is applied at one or several places to the chamber, as in the U.S. Patent to Bugbee No. 2,972,330, for example. Fig. 1 also shows several spaced areas such as (P_1-P_2) and (P_2-P_3) having pressure differences among them. In this figure, the number 1 refers to an elongated sheet moving from right to left as indicated by the arrows. The
30 number 2 refers to a guide roller which guides the elongated sheet 1 as it is conducted into the space 4, and 3 is a sealing attachment, which is an important feature of this invention and which is operative in combination with the guide roller 2. The numbers 4, 5 and 6 designate differential pressure chambers which are constructed so that the degree of vacuum existing in an any given chamber may be increased from atmospheric pressure P_0 to the negative pressures P_1 , P_2 , P_3 ... increasing in the order of the subscripts,
35 over several spaces with pressure differences, between them, while maintaining the pressure differences continuously as the elongated sheet 1 advances through the treatment method.

On the inner side of a differential-pressure casing 7, which corresponds to a boundary between pressure regions P_0 - P_1 , the guide roller 2, is provided on which the elongated sheet 1 is passed.

40 The elongated sheet 1 is guided on the outside of guide roller 2, preferably at a wrap contact angle θ - (Fig. 1(a)).

The sealing attachment 3 (Fig. 1) surrounds approximately half of the outer surface of the guide roller 2. It includes a concave arcuate sealing surface S_1 shaped to form an extremely small or narrow gap δ_1 with the outer surface of the guide roller 2, except for the inlet region through which the incoming elongated sheet 1 passes. It also includes a further concave arc-shaped sealing surface S_2 (Fig. 2) which is shaped to
45 form extremely small gaps δ_2 and δ_3 , δ_3' , (Fig. 1); δ_2 , δ_3 , with the back surface and the two sides of the elongated sheet 1 in the winding region, and a slit t (Figs. 1 and 2) which has a much larger opening than the cross-sectional dimensions of the elongated sheet 1. The latter opening t is located inside the second concave arc-shaped sealing surface S_2 and connected with it, in a direction tangential to the guide roller 2. Its outer appearance is shown in Fig. 2(a), while the concave arc-shaped sealing surfaces S_1 and S_2 which
50 face the guide roller 2 are shown in an inverted form in Fig. 2(b).

Turning further to the form of the invention shown in Fig. 1, the pressure differences (P_1-P_2) and (P_2-P_3) between the differential pressure chambers 4 and 5 and 5 and 6 are much smaller than the above-mentioned pressure difference (P_0-P_1) , and in these chambers roller seals are provided by means of spaced pairs of sealing guide rollers 8, 8 and 9, 9 which have their axes displaced in the direction in which
55 the elongated sheet passes through the apparatus, one being in an upstream position and the other in a downstream position in relation to the direction in which the elongated sheet is moving.

Furthermore, it is unavoidable for δ_2 and δ_1 , shown in Fig. 1, to become somewhat too large when the width of the elongated sheet is changed, and it is also suitable to provide auxiliary plates which can move in

the axial direction of the roller and are air-tight, so that the gaps can be continuously controlled to be very small.

Since the single guide roller which guides the introduction of the elongated sheet into the apparatus is preferably provided with a sealing attachment 3 (see Figs. 2(a) and 2(b)) which has a concave arcuate sealing surface which is separated only by an extremely small gap from the roller surface, which gap includes the elongated sheet, not only is an effective differential-pressure seal formed, but the elongated sheet is guided on the above-mentioned guide roller at a angle of wrap. Further, since the elongated sheet in this wrap area is attracted and held tightly to the outer surface of the roller 2 it is not possible for strong surface pressure to be applied to the elongated sheet. This would have a harmful effect on the product quality. Nor can vibration, even if present, be applied to the elongated sheet in a manner to cause it to break.

When the elongated sheet 1 is wrapped on the guide roller 2 and passes through the apparatus the product quality sometimes differs simply because of an undesirable angle of wrapping, due to the wrap angle θ and the tension of the elongated sheet 1; therefore, it is desirable for the wrap contact angle to be limited to the range of 15° - 120° and the tension to be set in the range of 0.1 - 2.0 kg/mm².

The foregoing principles will further be explained on the basis of an actual example in which a TiN coating (0.8 μ m thick) was formed on a silicon steel plate, manufactured under the conditions set forth below, by means of an ion plating treatment using the apparatus of Fig. 1.

The silicon steel sheet used in the actual example was manufactured as follows. A silicon steel slab with the composition shown in Table 1 was heated for 4 hours at $1,340^\circ\text{C}$ after which it was drawn while hot and finished to form a hot drawn sheet 2.0 mm thick. After this, it was cold-drawn twice, with an intermediate annealing for 3 minutes at 950°C between these drawings, and a final cold-drawn sheet 0.23 mm thick was formed. Then, a decarburization primary recrystallization annealing step was performed in moist hydrogen at 830°C , after which an annealing separator agent composed of MgO (35%), Al_2O_3 (60%), TiO_2 (4%), and SrSO_4 (1%) was applied to the surface of the steel sheet, and a secondary recrystallization annealing step was performed for 5 hours at 850°C . After this, a purification annealing step was performed in dry hydrogen at $1,180^\circ\text{C}$ for 8 hours, and the oxide on the surface of the steel sheet was then removed by acid washing. The steel sheet was then finished to a center line mean roughness of $R_a=0.1$ μ m by electrolytic polishing.

Table 1

C	Si	Mn	Se	Sb	Mo
0.043%	3.36%	0.72%	0.022%	0.025%	0.013%

Fig. 3 is a graph showing the effects on the magnetic properties (magnetic flux density B_{10} and the iron loss $W_{17/50}$) of an elongated steel sheet when the wrap contact angle θ and the tension were varied. The circles indicate excellent magnetic properties, the triangles indicate acceptable properties and the crosses indicate unacceptable properties. It is clear in Fig. 3 that good magnetic properties were shown, as marked by the circles and triangles in the graph, when the wrap contact angle with the guide roller 2 was greater than 15° and preferably greater than 60° , and the tension was in the range of 0.1 - 2.0 kg/mm², and preferably 0.2 - 0.5 kg/mm². In contrast to this, when the wrap contact angle θ was small and the tension on the steel sheet was less than 0.1 kg/mm², the magnetic properties were adversely affected by vibration of the steel sheet when it was conducted to the differential pressure chambers, as marked with crosses in the graph, and breakage and other damage were caused. Moreover, the magnetic properties were also adversely affected when the tension was greater than 2.0 kg/mm², as marked by crosses in the graph.

Furthermore, when the wrap contact angle θ was greater than 120° , the sealing lengths differed between the upper and lower sealing attachments 3 and the roller, as is clear for example, from Fig. 1, and the amounts of air flowing through the gaps became asymmetrical; therefore, considerable sheet breakage was caused due to unevenness in the steel sheet. For this reason, it is highly desirable for the wrap contact angle θ to be less than 120° .

The case of quality deterioration of an elongated sheet which has been tightly compressed by a pair of rollers is shown in Fig. 4, in which, after a grain oriented silicon steel sheet was finished by annealing, its surface oxide was removed and it was polished to a mirror surface with a center line mean roughness

$R_a = 0.1 \mu\text{m}$; the degree of reduction of iron loss, which depends on the surface pressure exerted by the roller seal in this case, is shown in Fig. 4. As the surface pressure was increased, and in particular when it exceeded 100 kg/cm^2 , the iron loss reduction was marked. In contrast to this, when this invention was used, a reliable differential pressure seal was achieved by means of a sealing attachment of this invention on a single guide roller, with no possibility of producing excessive surface pressure.

As a further example a TiN coating ($0.8 \mu\text{m}$ thick) was formed on a silicon steel sheet by ion plating, using a PVD apparatus which incorporated the differential-pressure sealing device shown in Fig. 1, and the magnetic properties of the product obtained were investigated.

The results, together with the conditions prevailing at the time the sheet passed through the apparatus are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

	Wrap contact angle θ (degrees)	Tension (kg/mm^2)	Magnetic flux density B_{10} (T)	Iron loss $W_{17/50}$ (W/kg)
Suitable example	75	0.3	1.94	0.68
Comparison example	40	3.5	1.89	0.81

The above-mentioned silicon steel sheet was produced as follows. A silicon steel slab with the composition shown in Table 3 was heated for 3 hours at $1,440^\circ\text{C}$, after which it was rolled while hot and made into a hot-rolled sheet 1.8 mm thick. After this, it was cold-rolled twice, with an intermediate annealing at $1,050^\circ\text{C}$ between these rollings, and a final cold-rolled sheet 0.23 mm thick was formed. Then, a decarburization annealing step was performed in moist hydrogen at 850°C , after which an annealing separator agent composed of MgO (35%) and Al_2O_3 (65%) was applied to the surface of the steel sheet, and a secondary recrystallization annealing was performed by raising the temperature from 850°C to $1,050^\circ\text{C}$ at 15°C/hr . After this a purification annealing step was performed in dry hydrogen at $1,200^\circ\text{C}$ for 8 hours, and the oxide on the surface of the steel sheet was then removed by acid washing. The steel sheet was then finished to a center line mean roughness of $R_a = 0.1 \mu\text{m}$ by electrolytic polishing.

Table 3

C	Si	Mn	Al	Se	Mo	N
0.058%	3.39%	0.76%	0.026%	0.021%	0.018%	0.0078%

Furthermore, the differential-pressure sealing device according to this invention is also extremely useful when applied to a grain oriented silicon steel sheet and when one is removing oxides after a finishing annealing treatment. It is also particularly useful when a beneficial iron loss reduction of grain oriented silicon steel sheet is obtained by forming a tension film by way of a mixed phase of at least one nitride and/or carbide of Ti, Zr, V, Nb, Ta, Cr, Mo, Co, Ni, Mn, Al, B, or Si and oxides of Al, Ni, Cu, W, Si, or Zn with the base steel by means of dry plating after the sheet passes through the step of mirror finishing of $R_a \leq 0.4 \mu\text{m}$ (see Japanese Patent Laid-open Nos. 62-1,820, 62-1,822, etc.).

In particular, this invention can also be applied, of course, in cases in which a super low iron loss is made possible beneficially by the effective use of elastic tension in both steel plate surfaces by dry plating at a temperature of 100°C - $1,100^\circ\text{C}$ (see Japanese Patent Laid-Open No. 62-30,302).

Suitable ranges for the wrap contact angle θ and the tension of the elongated sheet 1 are as started above; however, when the values set are near the lower limits of the above-mentioned ranges, there is in fact a chance that vibration, etc. will be caused in the elongated sheet 1 as it passes through. In such a

case, the suction and tight adhesion of the elongated sheet 1 to the outer surface of the guide roller 2 in the winding region of the roller can be effectively provided.

Fig. 5 shows an especially suitable example of the differential-pressure sealing device of this invention in which the single guide roller 2 is a hollow roller with numerous pores 2a extending through its outer surface, and this hollow roller 2 encloses a fixed cylindrical member 10 which has a number of suction openings 10a (see also Fig. 5(b)), which are connected to a suction opening 11a provided in a fixed axle 11 (Fig. 5(b)) which supports the said part 10. The elongated sheet 1 is sucked and held tightly to the outer surface of the roller 2 in the winding region by the operation of a vacuum pump (not shown) during the time the elongated sheet 1 passes through the apparatus.

Furthermore, suitable sizes for the pores 10a in the outer surface of the guide roller 2 are about 0.1ϕ - 2.0ϕ mm. The suction force which sucks and tightly adheres the elongated sheet 1 to the outer surface of the roller is determined by the diameter (a) of the suction openings 10a and the gap (b) formed between the inner surface of the guide roller 2 and the cylindrical part 10 (see Fig. 5(a)). If these are set so that $(a) \gg (b)$, the air which is sucked in from holes outside the winding region is negligible. Moreover, in order to provide reliable suction of the elongated sheet 1 in the winding region of the guide roller 2, it is also suitable to apply a sealing material 12 to the surface of the cylindrical part 10.

In this device, it is desirable that the single guide roller 2 consist of a hollow roller and that the inside of the hollow roller be provided with a magnet which attracts the elongated sheet tightly against the outer surface of the roller in the entrance area.

Fig. 6 also shows several spaced areas such as (P_1-P_2) and (P_2-P_3) having pressure differences among them. In this figure, the number 1 refers to an elongated sheet moving from right to left as indicated by the arrows. The number 2 refers to a hollow guide roller which guides the elongated sheet 1 as it is conducted into the space 4. 15 is a magnet placed inside the guide roller 2, and 3 is a sealing attachment, which is an important feature of this invention and which is operative in combination with the guide roller 2 whether the roller 2 is hollow or not and whether or not it includes the magnet 15. The numbers 4, 5 and 6 designate differential pressure chambers which are constructed so that the degree of vacuum existing in any given chamber may be increased from atmospheric pressure P_0 to the negative pressures P_1 , P_2 , P_3 ... increasing in the order of the subscripts, over several spaces with pressure differences, between them, while maintaining the pressure differences continuously as the elongated sheet 1 advances through the treatment method.

On the inner side of a differential-pressure casing 7, which corresponds to a boundary between pressure regions P_0-P_1 , the guide roller 2, on which the elongated sheet 1 is passed, is supported by a bearing 13 (Figs. 6(b) and 7) so that it can rotate. The magnet 15 is located inside the guide roller 2 (an electromagnet is assumed in this example) and is fixed by means of a support 11, which is connected to a magnetism-controlling electrode 16 connected in the usual way for selectively applying and removing a magnetic field. These parts are arranged so that only the guide roller 2 but not the magnet 15 is rotated by a drive device (which may be a conventional motor or the like, not shown in the drawings), by way of a pulley 14.

Fig. 7 shows the structure by which the magnet 15 is fixed inside the guide roller 2. The elongated sheet 1 is guided on the outside of guide roller 2, preferably at a shallow wrap contact angle θ (Fig. 8).

The magnetic force of magnet 15, when it consists of an electromagnet, can be regulated suitably by regulating the current applied. In order for magnet 15 to act effectively on the elongated sheet 1 from within the guide roller 2, the end of the magnet, as shown in Fig. 7, is located adjacent to the inner wall of the guide roller 2 and at a substantially central part of the long dimension of the elongated sheet 1, in the wrap region.

Fig. 9 shows a modified form of the invention in which the high pressure differences from P_0 to P_1 and from P_1 to P_2 were achieved more advantageously by twice repeating the differential-pressure seal structure shown in Fig. 1. Fig. 10 shows an example in which the sealing effectiveness is further increased by twice repeating the differential-pressure seal described above, using two differential-pressure sealing devices of this invention placed opposite each other and close to the guide rollers 2 and 2', and wherein the elongated sheet 1 is not squeezed by or between the rollers 2, 2'.

Furthermore, Fig. 11 shows a case in which the sealing effectiveness of the apparatus is increased by repeating the differential-pressure seal twice, using two differential-pressure sealing devices with guide rollers 2 and 2' placed opposite each other with a space between them and a plate 17 with a slit 17 inserted between them.

In all of the above-mentioned cases, the differential-pressure sealing device of this invention, by using very small gaps of about 0.01-0.5 mm, was able efficiently to maintain pressure differences of about 1.5-20 fold between adjacent pressure difference chambers when the width of the elongated sheet was, for

example, 300-1,200 mm and its thickness was 0.1-0.2 mm.

In Fig. 12 an example is shown in which the differential-pressure seals on the sides of the device are increased by covering the end surfaces of the guide roller 2 adjacent to the journals and creating additional differential-pressure seals there, and Figs. 13, 14 show examples in which the differential-pressure seals on the sides of the device are increased further by forming steps or concave portions in the end surfaces of the guide rollers 2 adjacent to the journals and enclosing them, with sealing attachment 3 with shapes which conform to the shapes of these steps or concave parts in order to create additional differential-pressure seals there. Furthermore, in the example shown in Fig. 13, the pressure difference (P_2-P_3) between the pressure difference chambers 4 and 5 and 5 and 6 is much smaller than (P_0-P_1). In the same way as shown in Fig. 1, a roller seal is formed due to a pair of sealing rollers 8 and 9 which substantially completely block the chamber to provide the seal but which do not squeeze the elongated sheet. Rollers 8 and 9 have their axes displaced from one another in the direction in which the sheet passes through the apparatus, one being in an upstream position and the other in a downstream position in relation to the direction of movement of the elongated sheet 1.

Furthermore, Fig. 15 shows an example in which a large negative pressure difference from P_0 to P_6 can be achieved more advantageously by repeating the differential-pressure seal shown in Fig. 9 as many as six times.

Fig. 16 shows a further modification of the sealing attachment 3 wherein a vacuum passage 20 and fitting 21 are provided for applying vacuum adjacent the guide roller 2 and the lower surface of the elongated sheet 1 after it has contacted the guide roller 2. A further vacuum passage 22 and fitting 23 are provided for applying a vacuum to the upper surface of elongated sheet 1 as it wraps upon the guide roller 2.

Fig. 17(a) shows a supplemental seal block 24 mounted in a hollow portion and interposed between the guide roller 2 and the lower portion of the sealing attachment 3, out of contact with the surface of the elongated sheet 1, extending at about right angles to the direction of movement of the sheet.

Fig. 17(b) shows a different form of supplemental seal in the form of a roller 25 also mounted in a hollow portion of the sealing attachment 3, and also mounted at about right angle to the direction of movement of the elongated sheet, like the block 24 of Fig. 17(a), but in many cases being capable of creating a more effective differential pressure.

It will accordingly be appreciated that this invention is directed to a differential-pressure sealing device which connects spaced areas having pressure differences among them, and permits the continuous passage of an elongated sheet while maintaining the pressure differences at the desired levels.

The sealing device according to this invention may include a single guide roller which guides the passage of the elongated sheet, which may be located between the above-mentioned spaced areas and a sealing attachment which is positioned so that it surrounds the elongated sheet with part of one of its opposed surfaces located close to the surface of the sheet of the above-mentioned roller, and shaped in such a way as to conform to the surface of the sheet; part of the other surface of the sealing attachment is positioned close to the outer surface of the above-mentioned roller, and its end is shaped in such a way to conform with the above-mentioned outer surface of the roller. This sealing surface has a side structure which conforms to the above-mentioned outer surface of the roller, the said end is placed close to the outer surface of the above-mentioned roller, and the two above-mentioned opposing parts are connected so that they maintain a substantially air-tight seal. In addition, the above-mentioned single roller is provided, on the inside, with a magnet or on the outer surface, with numerous pores which attracts the winding region of the elongated sheet to the outer surface of the roller and makes it adhere tightly to that surface.

The differential-pressure sealing device of this invention serves effectively to prevent the quality of an elongated sheet from deteriorating due to the surface pressure applied when a high differential-pressure seal is formed, without producing local surface pressure on the elongated sheet, by using only an attachment on a single guide roller, and serves to tightly adhere the elongated sheet which is being wound on the guide roller to the outer surface of the guide roller; in addition, it serves to prevent breakage of the elongated sheet caused by vibration of the elongated sheet or the associated conveyor. It is not only especially suitable for forming dry plating coatings on super-low iron loss grain oriented silicon steel sheets, but it can of course also be applied to soft steel, etc., the quality of which is readily affected by local surface pressures.

Although this invention has been disclosed with specific reference to a variety of forms of apparatus, it will be appreciated that additional variation and deviations may be made without departing from the principles of the invention. The use of magnet as disclosed in Figs. 6-8 or the use of suction as disclosed in Fig. 5 is not necessarily a basic part of the invention. Further, features shown in one of the drawings may be combined with features shown in others of the drawings, parts may be reversed and certain features of

the invention used independently with other features of the invention, all without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention as defined in the appended claims.

5 Claims

1. An apparatus for continuously processing an elongated sheet through successive zones of reduced pressure, comprising:
 - (a) means forming a chamber containing at least one of said zones of reduced pressure, said
 - 70 chamber having an entrance through which said elongated sheet may be introduced,
 - (b) vacuum means connected to maintain reduced pressure in said chamber,
 - (c) a guide roller arranged adjacent to said chamber and around which said elongated sheet may be wrapped prior to entering said chamber,
 - (d) means forming a sealing structure encompassing at least a portion of said chamber entrance and
 - 15 a portion of said elongated sheet to restrict the passage of said atmospheric air past said guide roller into said chamber,
 - (e) means for wrapping said elongated sheet upon said guide roller, and
 - (f) means for urging the wrapped portion of said elongated sheet tightly against the wrapped surface of said guide roller.
- 20 2. The apparatus as defined in claim 1 wherein the differential-pressure sealing attachment has opposing surfaces and surrounds the elongated sheet with part of one of its opposing surfaces placed close to the surface of the elongated sheet on said guide roller, and is shaped to conform to the surface of the sheet, and wherein part of the other surface of the sealing attachment is placed close to the outer surface of guide roller, and its end is shaped to conform with the outer surface of the guide roller, and wherein the
- 25 sealing attachment has a side structure which conforms to the outer surface of said guide roller and its end is placed close to the outer surface of said guide roller, and wherein both of said opposing surfaces are connected so that they maintain a substantially air-tight seal.
3. The apparatus defined in claim 1, wherein said applying means (f) includes a magnet located within said guide roller.
- 30 4. The apparatus defined in claim 3, wherein said magnet is an electromagnet.
5. The apparatus defined in claim 3, wherein said magnet is a permanent magnet.
6. The apparatus as defined in claim 1, wherein said guide roller includes a plurality of pores and wherein said applying means includes a vacuum means communicating with the interior of said guide roller and acting through said pores to suck said elongated sheet against the wrapped surface of said guide roller.
- 35 7. The apparatus as defined in claim 1, wherein the angle of wrap of said elongated sheet upon said guide roller is 15-120°.
8. The apparatus as defined in claim 1, wherein a plurality of said zones of reduced pressure is provided in said chamber, and wherein passages are provided between said zones for continuous movement of said elongated sheet from zone to zone.
- 40 9. The apparatus as defined in claim 1, wherein sealing rollers are provided in a zone of reduced pressure.
10. The apparatus as defined in claim 9, wherein said sealing rollers are arranged in staggered relationship such that the axis of rotation of one sealing roll is positioned upstream of the axis of rotation of the other sealing roll in relation to the direction of movement of said elongated sheet.
- 45 11. The apparatus as defined in claim 1, wherein said sealing structure (d) includes a concave arcuate surface shaped to form a narrow gap with the outer surface of said guide roller (c).
12. The apparatus as defined in claim 11, wherein said sealing structure (d) is shaped to provide close clearance with the ends of said guide roller in a manner to restrict the flow of air.
13. The apparatus as defined in claim 1, wherein said sealing structure (d) includes an arcuate surface and a slit portion located downstream of said arcuate surface with respect to the direction of movement of
- 50 said elongated sheet.
14. The apparatus as defined in claim 9, wherein said sealing rollers have axes that are displaced in the direction of movement of said elongated sheet.
15. The apparatus as defined in claim 1, wherein a plurality of said chambers (a) is provided adjacent
- 55 one another along the direction of movement of said elongated sheet and provided with entrance and exit openings to accommodate passage of said sheet, and wherein sealing rollers are provided in a plurality of said chambers (a) adjacent to openings therein, thereby increasing their sealing effectiveness.

16. The apparatus as defined in claim 15, wherein said sealing rollers are arranged close to one of said openings which extends from one chamber to the other, one sealing roller on the upstream side and the other sealing roller on the downstream side of said opening.

17. The apparatus as defined in claim 16, wherein said sealing rollers are arranged to guide said elongated sheet through an arcuate path.

18. The apparatus as defined in claim 17, wherein a plate is provided between said sealing rollers and provided with a slit providing a passage for said elongated strip.

19. The apparatus as defined in claim 1, wherein sealing rollers are provided in said chamber (a) which are of a size and shape to substantially block flow of air in the direction of movement of said elongated sheet.

20. The apparatus as defined in claim 1, wherein said guide roller includes a shouldered portion shaped to conform to a corresponding internal shape of said sealing structure (d).

21. The apparatus defined in claim 1, further including supplemental means for drawing a vacuum between said sealing structure (d) and said guide roller (c).

22. The apparatus defined in claim 21, wherein said sealing structure includes an upper portion located above said guide roller and a lower portion located adjacent said guide roller below the path of movement of said elongated sheet, and wherein said supplemental vacuum means is located in said lower portion of said sealing structure.

23. The apparatus defined in claim 1, wherein said sealing structure includes an upper portion located above said guide roller and a lower portion located adjacent said guide roller below the path of movement of said elongated sheet, and wherein said lower portion includes a supplemental seal block disposed therein at a location closely adjacent to said guide roller.

24. The apparatus defined in claim 23, wherein said supplemental seal block is a roller.

25. In a method of continuously processing an elongated sheet through successive zones of reduced pressure, the steps which comprise:

(a) providing a chamber containing at least one zone of reduced pressure, said chamber having an entrance for introduction of said elongated sheet,

(b) applying negative pressure within said chamber,

(c) continuously feeding said elongated sheet around a guide roller for introduction into said chamber,

(d) continuously sealing at least a portion of the chamber entrance and a portion of said entering elongated sheet to resist the passage of atmospheric air into said chamber,

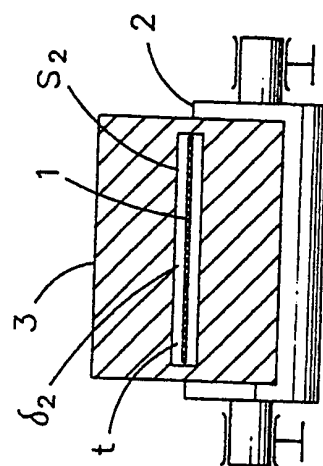
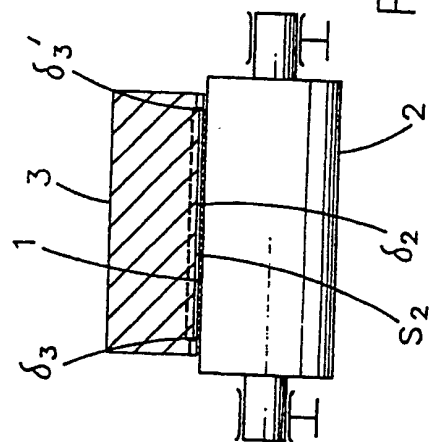
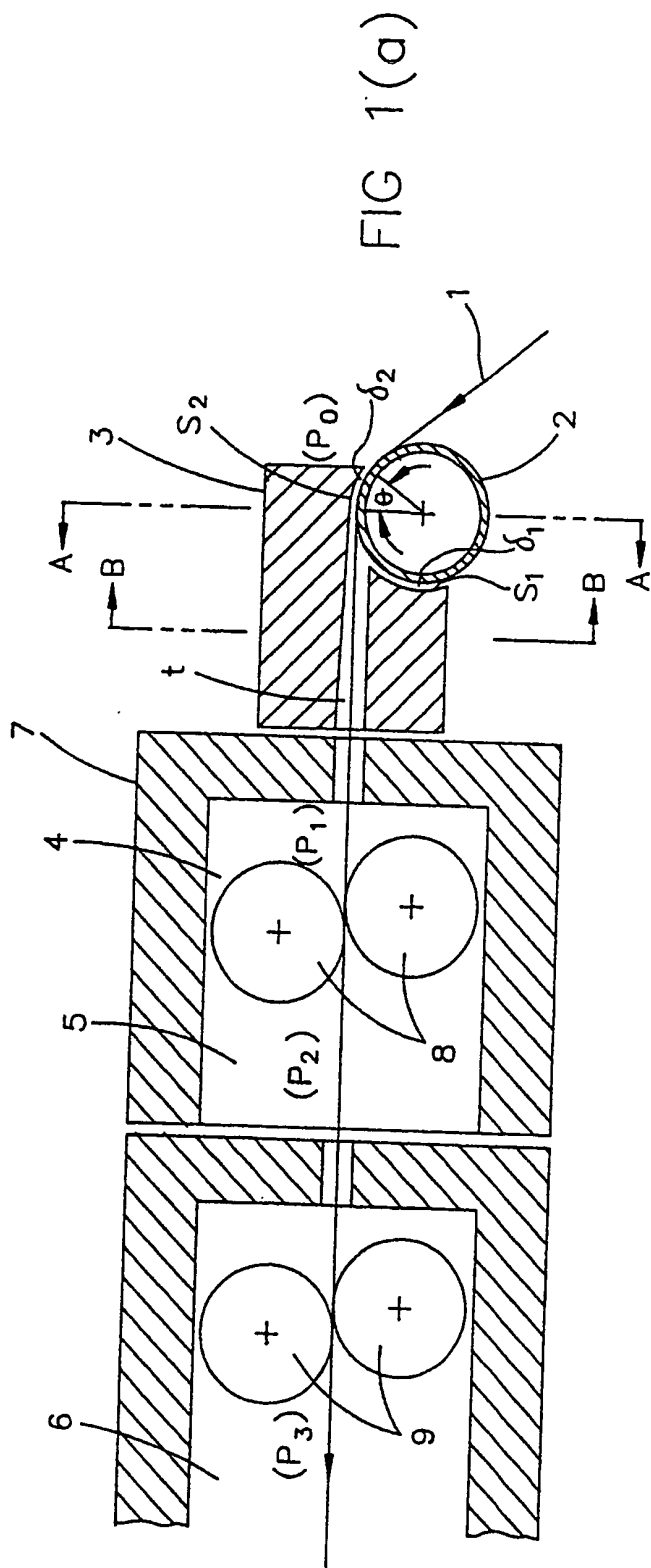
(e) continuously wrapping said elongated sheet around a portion of said guide roller, and

(f) continuously urging said elongated sheet against the wrapped portion of the surface of said guide roller.

26. The method defined in claim 25 including the further step of controlling the tension of the entering elongated sheet to 0.1-2.0 kg/mm².

27. The method defined in claim 25 wherein said urging action is applied by magnetic force.

28. The method defined in claim 25 wherein said urging action is applied by vacuum.



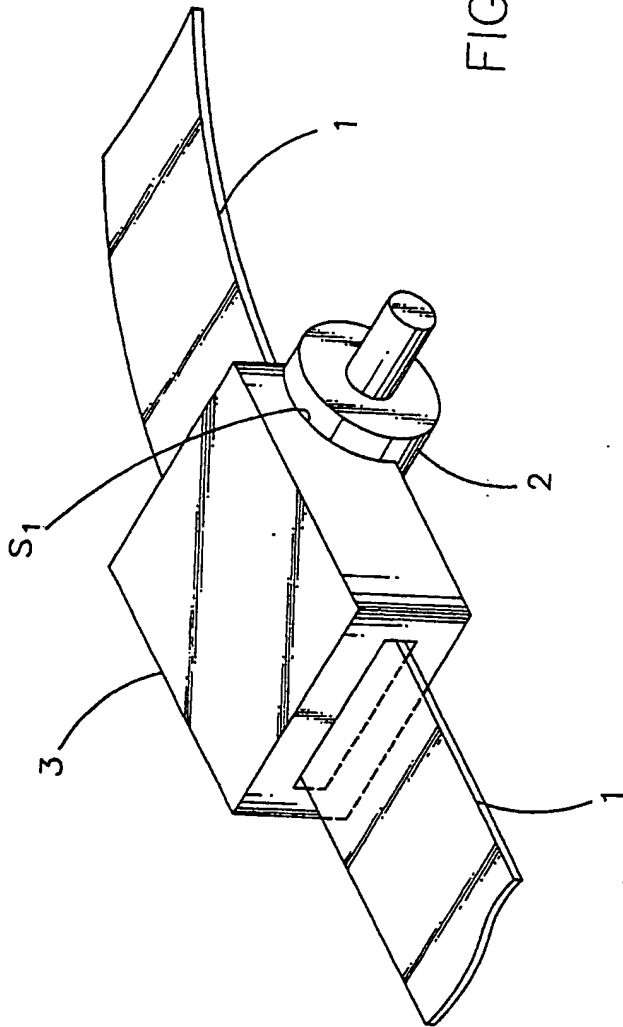
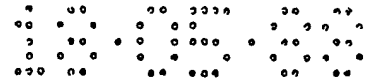


FIG 2(a)

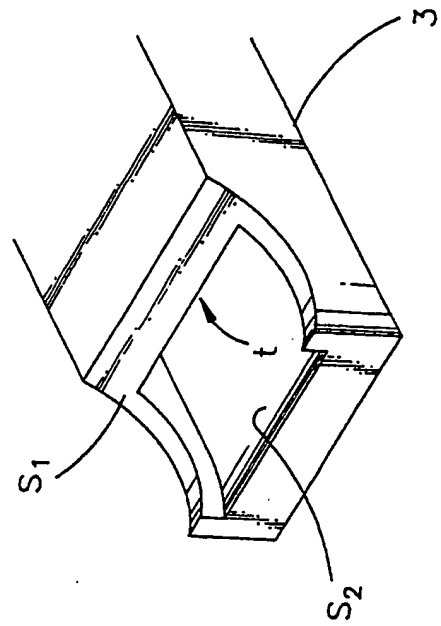


FIG 2(b)

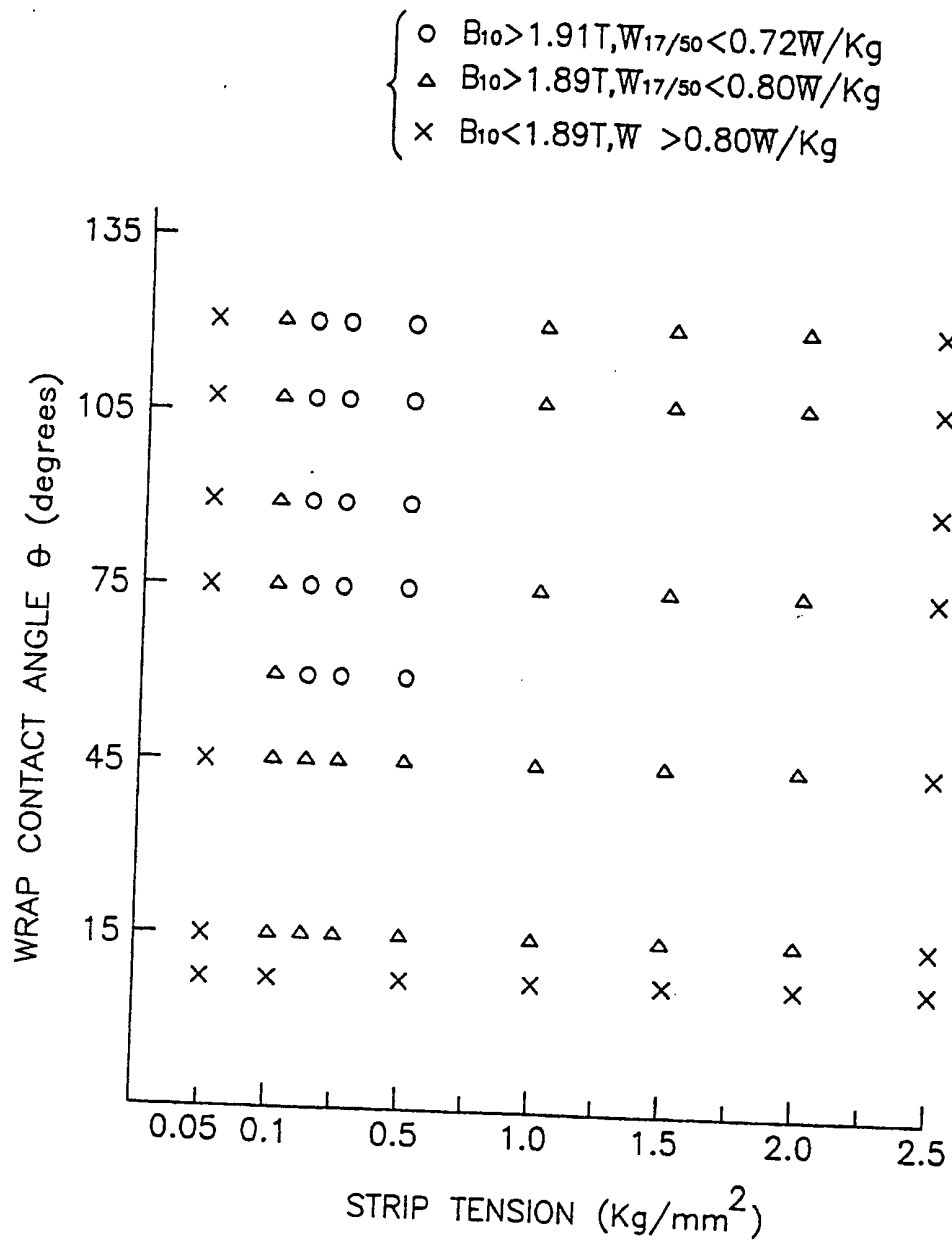
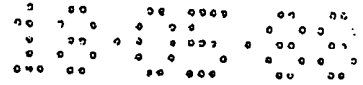


FIG 3

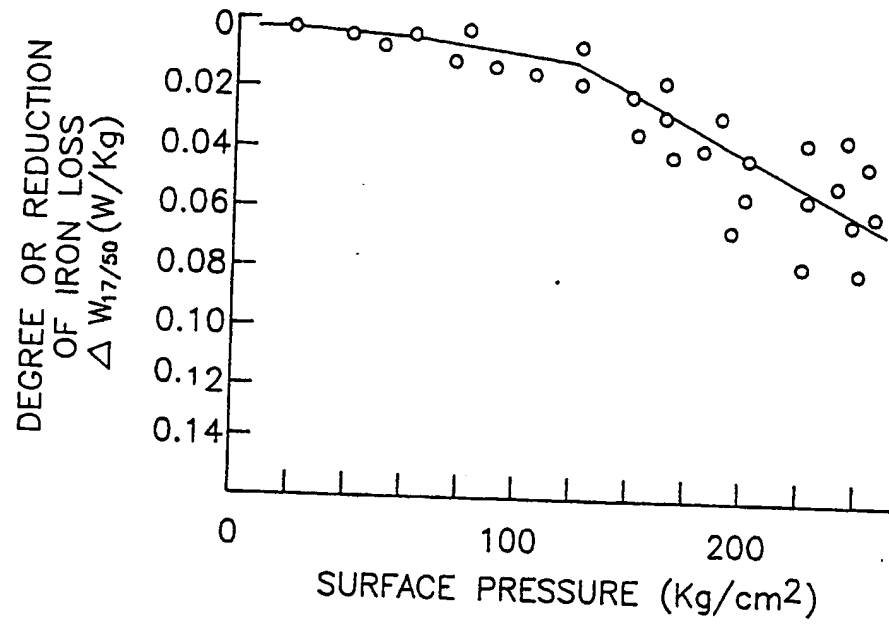


FIG 4

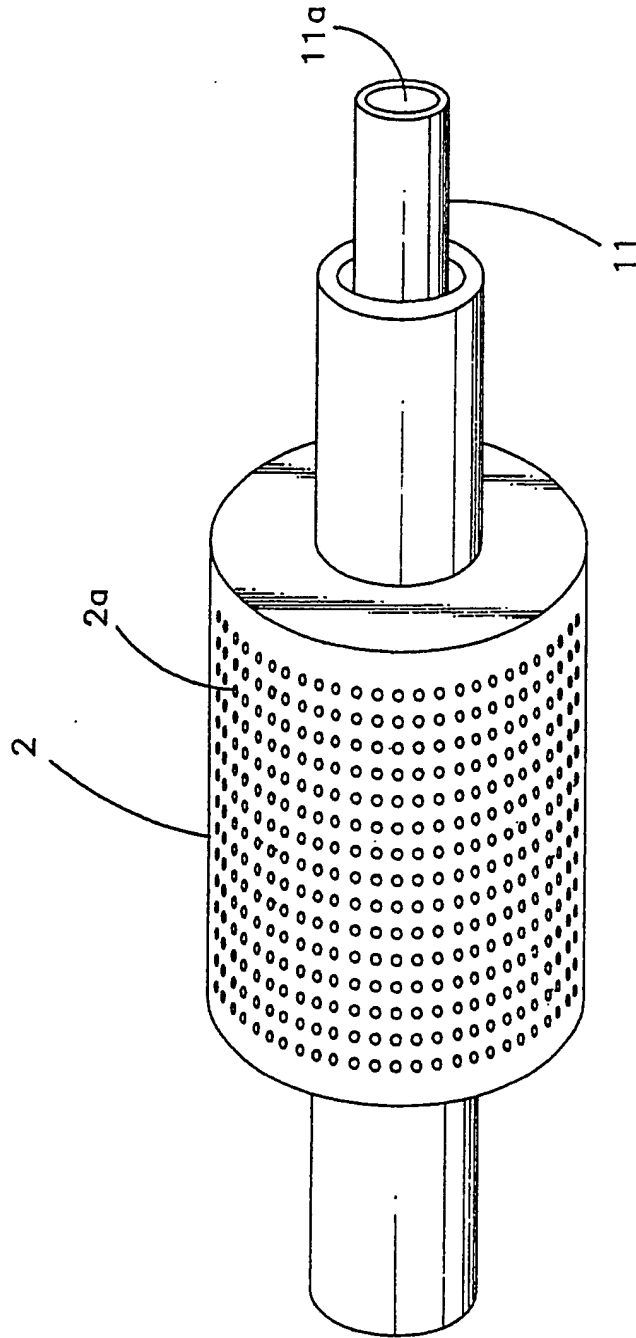


FIG. 5(c)

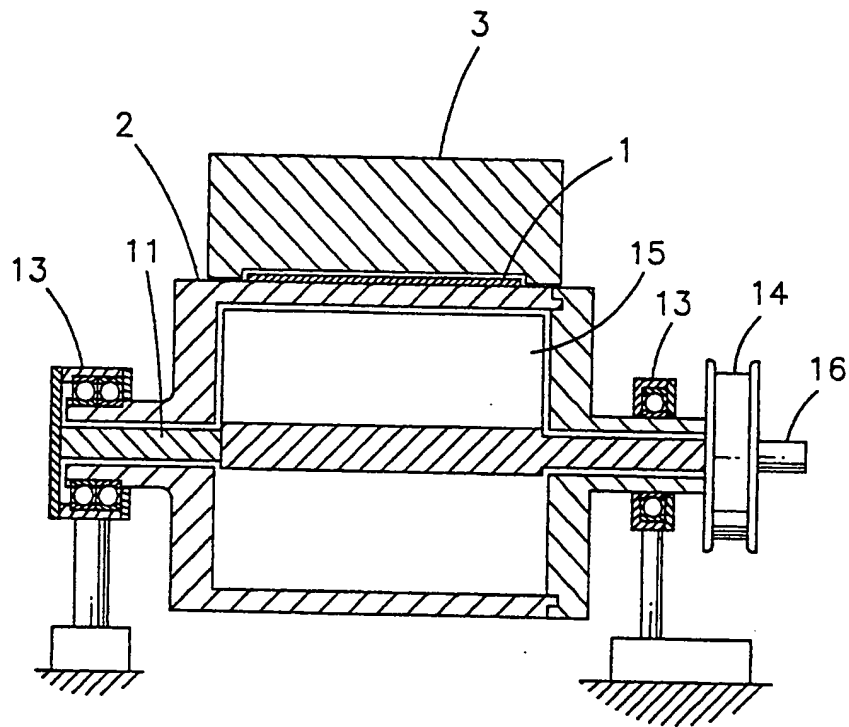
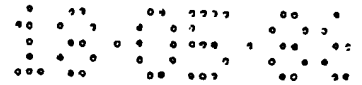


FIG 7

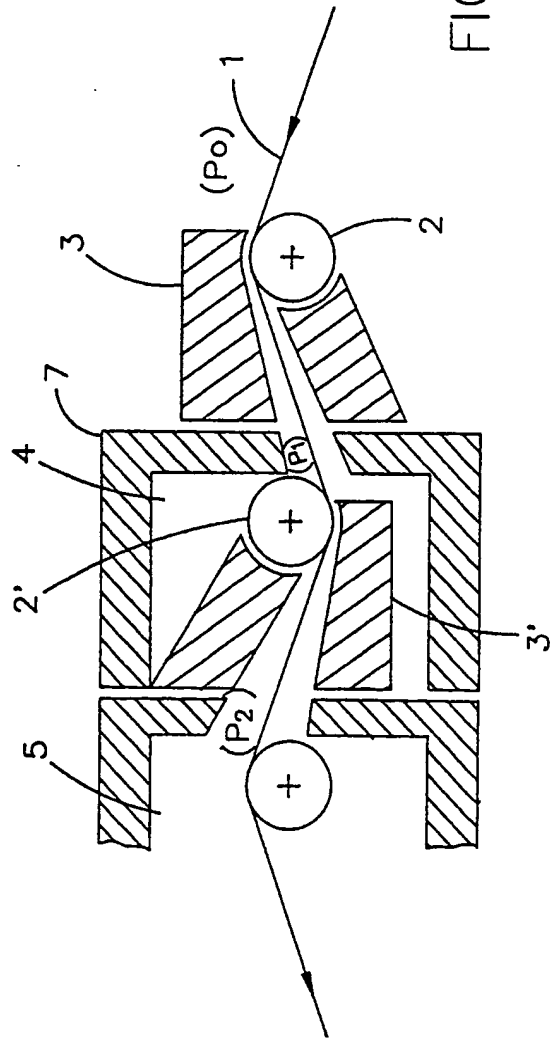
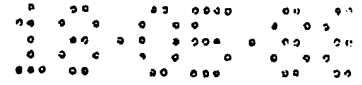


FIG 9

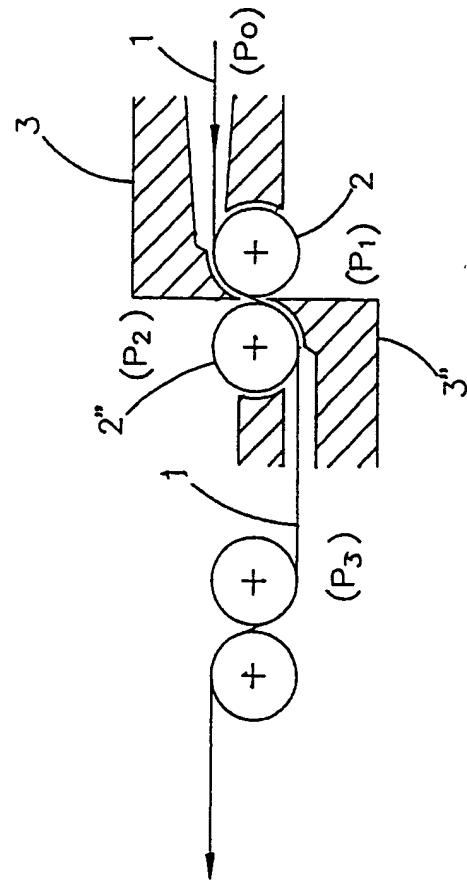


FIG 10

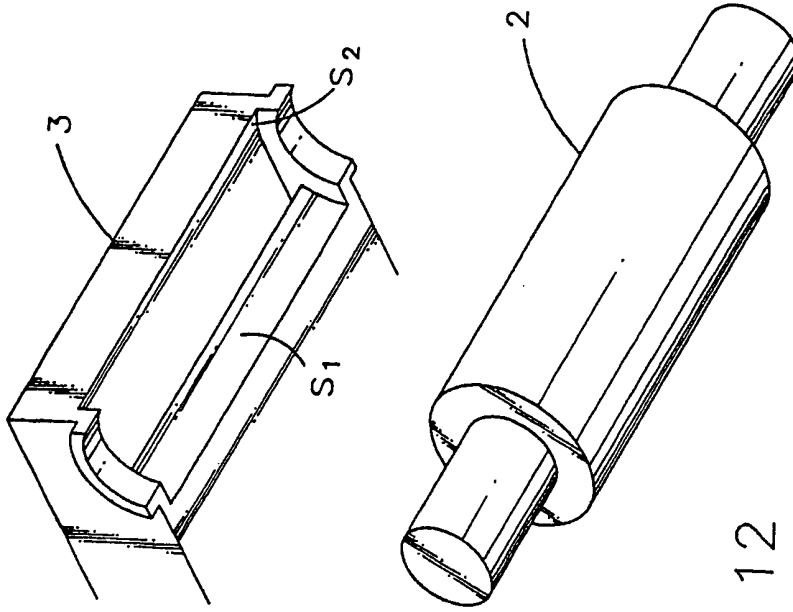
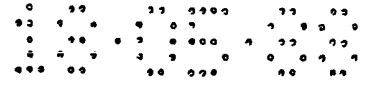


FIG 12

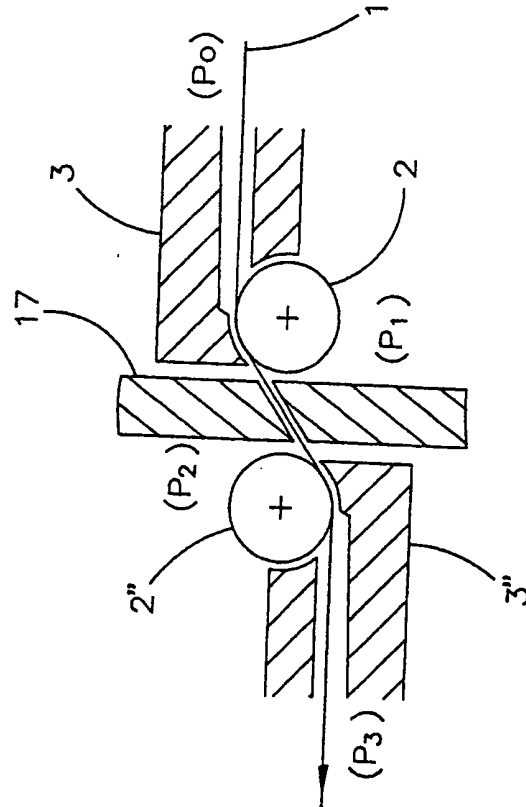
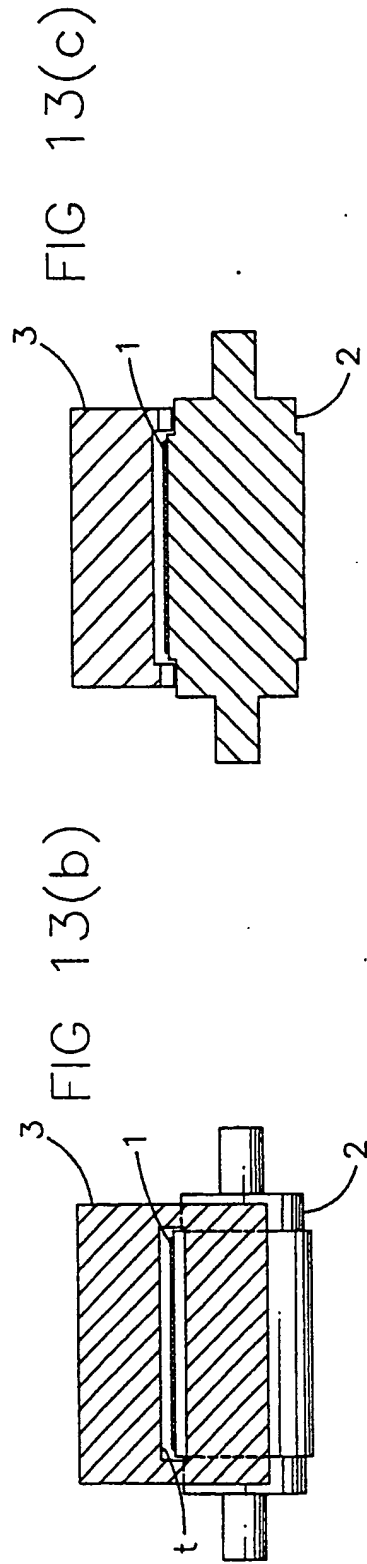
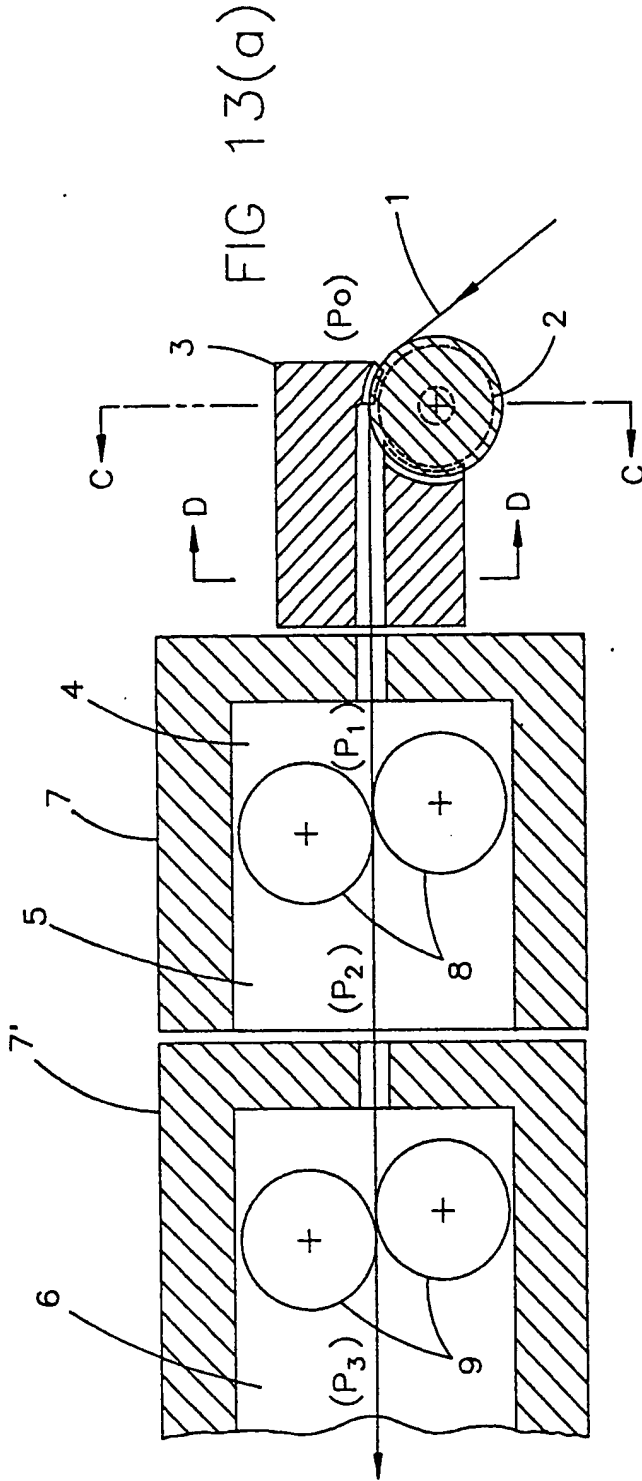
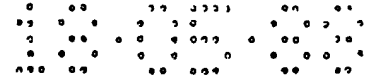


FIG 11



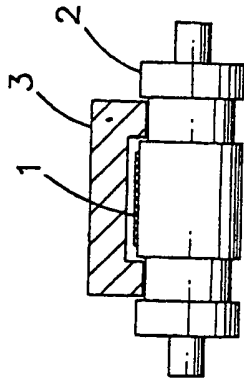


FIG 14

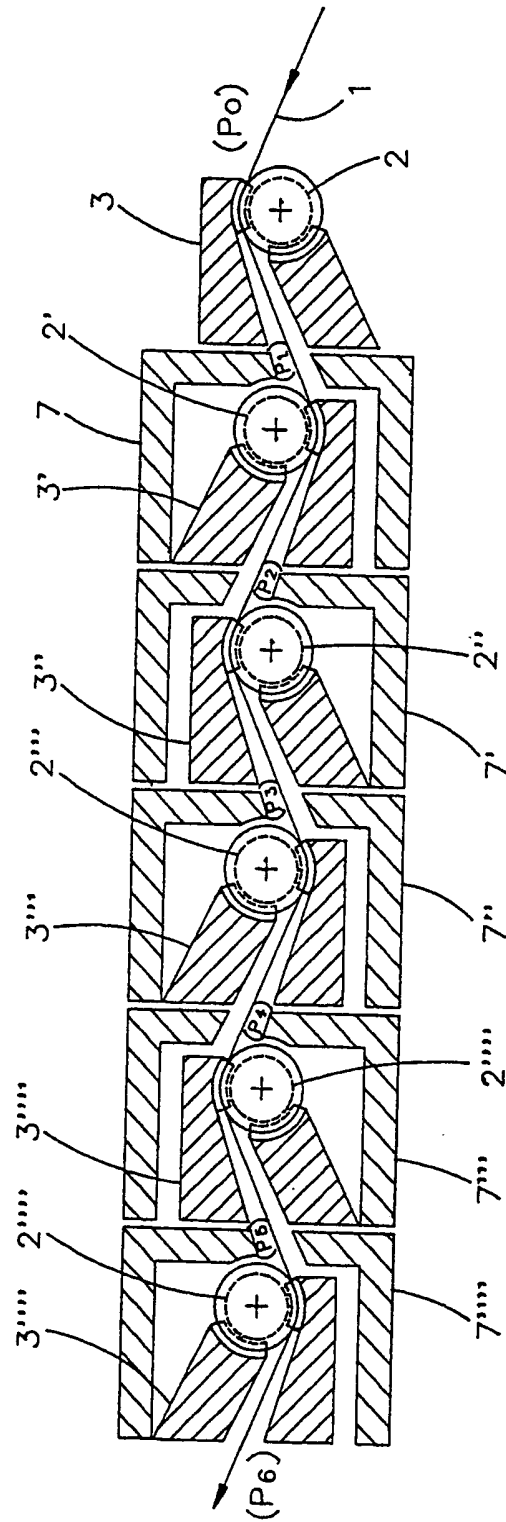


FIG 15

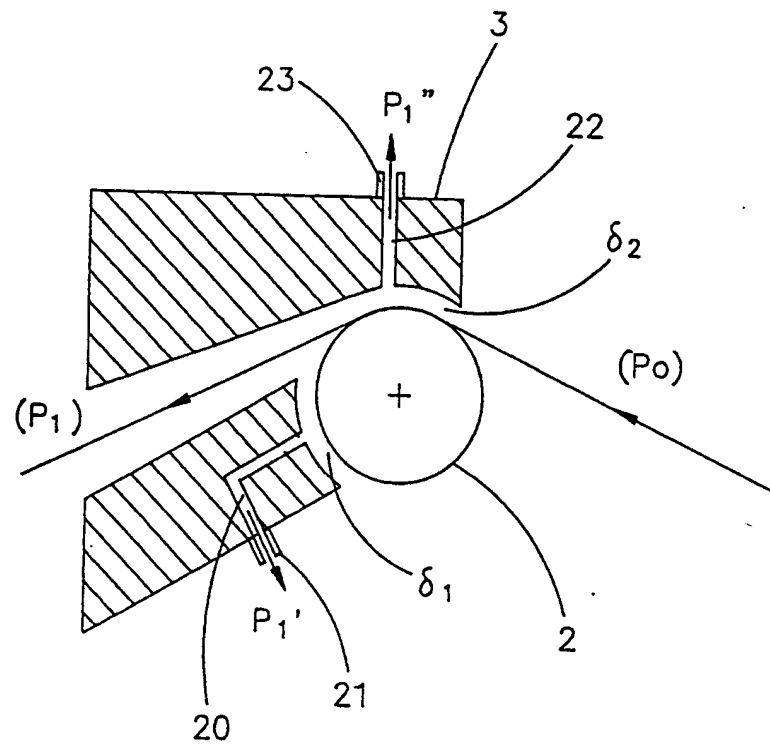
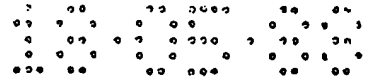


FIG 16

